



Creating a Gay-Straight Alliance in a Boys School: Challenges & Rewards





Approx. 3000 in U.S. schools (GLSEN, 2011)
53% of public high schools in California (GSA Network, 2016)

GSA???



Gay-straight alliances now mandatory
in Alberta: 'We're no longer that
redneck, roughneck province'

Workshop Agenda

- 1) Keeping in mind « why »
- 2) Vocabulary activity
- 3) Why GSAs are needed
- 4) How to start a GSA
- 5) What a GSA can do – examples
- 6) Selwyn House case study – noticeable impacts
- 7) Criticism & Difficulties
- 8) Discussion & Questions

WHY?



Selwyn House vision
statement:

VERITAS

- Be true to yourself
- Be true to others
- Be true to your school

LGBTQ what?!

- L = lesbian
- G = gay
- B = bisexual, bigender – (*pansexual*)
- T = transexual, transgender, two-spirit
- Q = *queer*, questioning

Sex & Gender Activity

(from Center for Gender Sanity, 2009,
<http://www.gendersanity.com/diagram.html>)

man	masculine	transitioning
woman	feminine	pansexual
male	questioning	
bigender	bisexual	
female	androgynous	
intersex	attracted to men	
genderqueer	asexual	
attracted to women		

It's our responsibility!



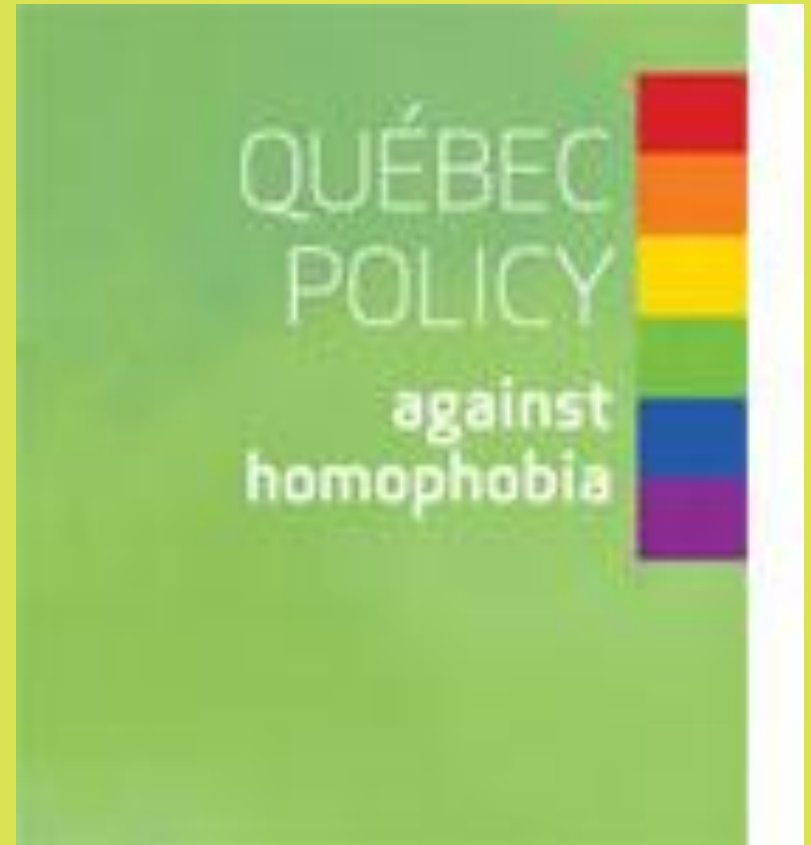
- 1) Keeping students safe is our **duty**
- 2) Doing our share to actively prevent bullying is our **legal responsibility**

Québec Policy Against Homophobia (2009)

The *Québec Policy Against Homophobia* was launched in December 2009 by the Minister of Justice.

Its four main guidelines:

- recognize the realities faced by sexual minority members;
- promote respect for the rights of sexual minority members;
- promote wellbeing;
- ensure a concerted approach.



Québec Bill 56 – An Act to Prevent and Stop Bullying & Violence in Schools (2012)



- Requires that every public and private educational institution adopt and implement an anti-bullying and anti-violence plan
- Requires that every school principal set up an anti-bullying and anti-violence team and designate a school staff member to coordinate its work
- Each school **action plan** must include:
 - prevention measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence based, among other things, on racism, **sexual orientation, sexual identity, homophobia**, a disability or a physical characteristic, as well as prevention measures to encourage the collaboration of parents in putting an end to bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure environment
- School personnel are responsible for protecting students from violence & intimidation

Other examples...



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (2011)

- Garden State Equality political advocacy group chairman Steve Goldstein has called it « **the toughest anti-bullying law in the country** »
- Requires schools to develop a plan that outlines how they will address bullying and all teachers and administrators must be trained to identify and respond to bullying
- Requires that every school have an anti-bullying specialist and a school safety team
- Requires that every public school report all cases of bullying or teasing to the state.
- 1st week of October = “**Week of Respect**” (education & awareness)

Equal Access Act (1984)

U.S. federal law



- If a public school has one student-led *non-curriculum* club that meets outside of class time, it must allow other such clubs to be organized and provide them with equal access to meeting spaces and resources
- Schools must allow a GSA if there is a student need
- A school can opt-out by not allowing any non-curriculum clubs
- « Officials need not endorse any particular student organization, but federal law requires that they afford all student groups the same opportunities to form, to convene on school grounds, and to have access to the same resources available to other school groups. » (Duncan, 2011, p. 2)

Boys as GLOBAL CITIZENS

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

- Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”
- Article 26: (1) Everyone has the right to education. [...]
(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

GSA = a win-win

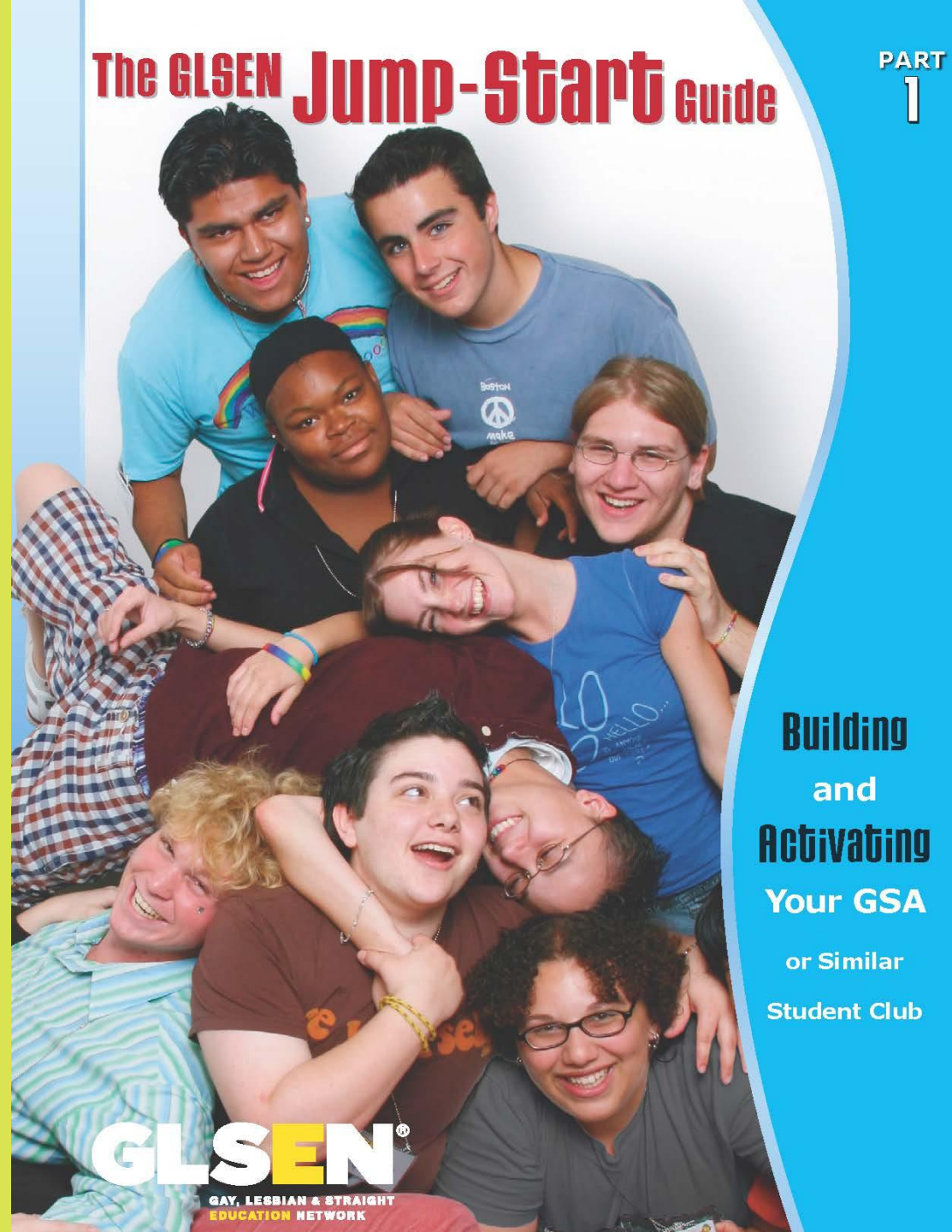
- Gay-straight alliances in schools reduce suicide risk for all students (Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014)
- Schools with a GSA have a more accepting climate where students feel safe (Kosciw, 2007)
- Offer a place where straight students can learn about LGBT issues
- Offer resources to students who are questioning their sexuality
- Help students understand a gay sibling or relative
- Study in Massachusetts → more than 50% of public schools have a GSA → these schools report more supportive climates for LGBT students (Szalacha, 2003)
- Link established between victimization and lower academic outcomes & self-esteem, as well as school-based supports and better academic outcomes (Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A., 2013)

Starting a GSA

GLSEN

(Gay, Lesbian
& Straight
Education
Network)
jump-start
guide

Available at:
glsen.org



**Building
and
Activating
Your GSA**

or Similar
Student Club

1) Get informed (attend a workshop, research, ask others) – need to be prepared to answer questions from the community

2) Get administration to « buy in » – why it's important, our legal responsibilities, intentions (reassure), show it is done elsewhere with positive impacts

Growing movement aims to create safe schools and encourage inclusivity

By Betty Rice

December 20, 2013

It's not so strange to find clubs on the campus of any high school. Students with common interests connect all the time to join groups focused on sports and academic interests as well as social clubs.

But it's only recently that students have gotten together to form gay-straight alliances, or GSAs. Today they're one of the fastest growing social movements within schools in North America.

"Alberta's first GSA was founded in 2000," says Kristopher Wells, an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. "Today, there are more than 40 GSAs in Alberta schools providing safe spaces and educational opportunities for students to learn about important human rights issues."

Wells, who is also the director of the Centre for the Study of the Institute for Sexual Minorities, says GSAs in junior and high schools are becoming more common.



UCC's Gay Straight Alliance

By Andrea Aster

If you were gay at Upper Canada College not so long ago, you probably died a bit inside each time you saw "fag-got" scrawled in the bathroom or under a stairwell. Fast forward to 2013. There's that word again — but it's on a giant screen as part of a PowerPoint presentation in Laidlaw Hall — and UCC student Ryan Stevenson is on stage. He tells everyone that he's gay. And he gets a standing ovation.

"In a way it's easier to be gay at an all-boys school," says Stevenson. "There are no girls to pretend to be macho for."

Though asserting one's homosexuality certainly isn't the bombshell it was even five years ago, and young people are increasingly comfortable or even blasé about it, courage is certainly required to be part of a vocal minority. Peer pressure will never go out of style.

That's why, as president of the College's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), Stevenson is an impressive leader stewarding a groundbreaking club with unprecedented enrollment. When it comes to outing homophobia and coming together to embrace diversity, the school has come a long way.

"A major goal of the GSA is to make people aware of the language they're using," says Stevenson. "We like to think attitudes have improved and sexuality isn't an issue, but homophobic language is still used, like 'that's so gay.' Gay doesn't mean stupid. It's not enough to say you don't mean it."

To show how dangerous language can be, Stevenson placed a series of defamatory words on slides in his coming-out presentation in assembly, a lead-up to the club's second annual Pink Shirt Day on Feb. 28. The event is held in conjunction with the school's Healthy Relationships Committee to celebrate gay-positivity, complete with students donning custom-printed, pink UCC T-shirts and pink feather boas festooning Upper School dining hall staff.



Members of the Gay Straight Alliance and staff/faculty advisors Vesna Krstich, Rachel Metcalfe and Ann Pearson celebrate Pink Shirt Day.

One of the school's most progressive clubs has created a nurturing environment that empowered a student to declare he was gay during a morning assembly.

While UCC had attempted an alliance of gay and straight students in the past, the club's current incarnation started in 2007 with weekly lunch meetings led by nurse Avia Peacock and art teacher Vesna Krstich. The club's original mandate was to offer a safe space for gay students and their supporters. Disclosing one's own sexuality was optional.

"It's well-documented that gay students thrive when they feel supported," says Peacock. "And with certain faculty also out, it sends an overall message of administrative support."

"It was amazing to watch the transformation for some kids. It's a place to come to be yourself. The personas just fly off. The boys can be expressive and talk about things like the weekend, in terms of the boys they met."

Over the past five years, however, owing to a general cultural shift in gay acceptance, the club has moved from offering a predominantly discussion-based forum to mobilizing for more high-impact events. With an original sign-on of just three kids, the club has doubled in size over the past two years, with 23 members this year.

"It's a changed culture," says Krstich. "Students are more sophisticated. Saying fag in a derogatory way happens, but not as much anymore."

That has left the GSA free to focus its efforts in other ways. One highlight was having former Toronto Maple Leafs president/general manager Brian Burke in to speak at assembly last fall. He has a tough gay persona but brought a message of compassion to Laidlaw Hall when he talked about his son Brendan, who died in a car crash just three months after coming out.

"People talked about it for weeks after," says Stevenson. "It was a real eye-opener, especially for athletes. It helped bridge our jock culture and made it a relevant issue."

Another of the club's signature initiatives shows just how far the school has come in terms of bridging disparate cliques and breaking down barriers. For older alumni who remember a more painfully closeted time, the GSAs' "BroValentine" event might sound like a fantasy scenario from another planet.

GSA "Cupid" dressed like SWAT team members in helmets with pink insignias descended on morning-period classes and delivered anonymous Valentine's cards previously purchased during a dedicated lunch period.

"There is, of course, a level of mockery about it," says Stevenson. "But it's also a great exchange at the level of camaraderie."

That level of camaraderie definitely reached its pinnacle to date with Stevenson's assembly speech. Three of his best friends rose first to applaud, followed by the rest of his peers.

"It was really intense," says Krstich. "Many of the teachers were in tears — and it was an act of courage, not just for Ryan, but for his friends to stand up first."

And that, in a nutshell, is what the GSA is all about. ■

3) **Try to find allies in the school** – colleagues, students who are « out » (male-female advisor model)

4) **Prepare for 1st meeting**

- decide on audience (all students? faculty? staff? parents?)
- introduce idea to school
- set agenda
- think about location
- snacks?

5) **First meeting** – suggestions:

- identify obstacles to more inclusive environment in your school
- set goals/mission statement
- brainstorm activity ideas

Selwyn House **GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE**

Would you like Selwyn House to be a safe and supportive place for all students, teachers and staff? Are you someone who identifies as LGBTQ or as an LGBTQ ally and would like to help foster this kind of environment? Would you simply like to know you have someone to talk to or meet meaningful role models? Join the Selwyn Gay-Straight Alliance! All students and staff welcome.

MISSION:

1. EDUCATE
2. PROMOTE INCLUSIVENESS
3. CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

Want to help? Want to join?
Want to talk?
Your Alliance advisors:
M. Grondin
Mme Thériault



5) Register your GSA ?



[Log In](#) [Blog](#) [Shop](#)

Enter search terms

[DONATE](#)

[LEARN](#)

[ACT](#)

[TEACH](#)

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State and School District Anti-Bullying Policies

A look at anti-bullying policies of all 13,181 U.S. school districts.

[READ MORE](#)

From Statehouse to Schoolhouse: Anti-Bullying Policy Efforts in U.S. State and School Districts



#OUTShine2015

Canada's 2nd National
Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Summit

Winnipeg 2015

OUTShine2015

What can a GSA do?

**Case study: Selwyn House School
(Montréal, QC)**

Triangle campaign

- Indicate a safe space or staff member to students
- See GLSEN's Safe Space Kit (free downloads)



The Selwyn Gay-Straight Alliance presents...

MOVIE NIGHT

When? Wednesday
October 9th, 2013
@ 17:30

Where?
Rossy Agora

Who is invited?
All parents, Senior
School students, and
staff

The GSA will briefly begin the session by presenting its mission and goals for the year. An open discussion will follow the movie.

Snacks will be provided.

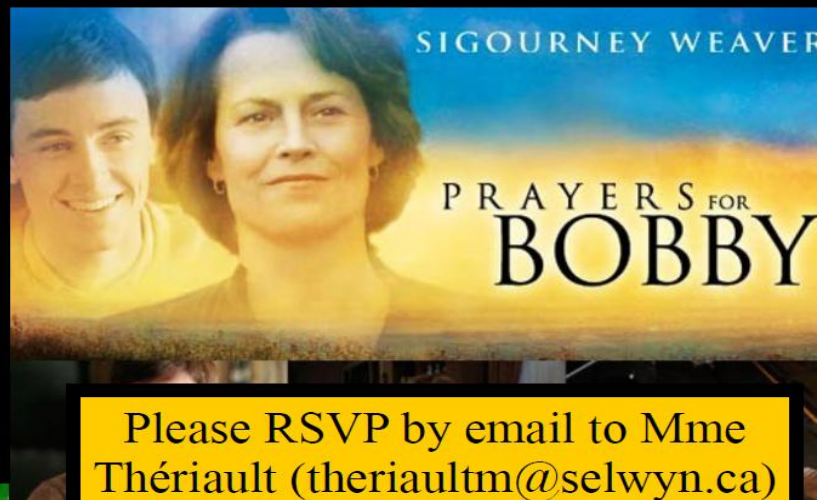
Prayers for Bobby tells the true story of Mary Griffith, a mother whose religious beliefs led her to reject her gay son. After living with the guilt of her son's suicide, she becomes a prominent human rights activist and advocate for gay youth.



Featuring

the award-winning film

PRAYERS FOR BOBBY



Please RSVP by email to Mme
Thériault (theriaultm@selwyn.ca)

BEING DIFFERENT



VIDEO CONTEST

Create a 30-second original video that showcases what it's like to be different and aims to celebrate diversity in your community.

TO PARTICIPATE:

- MS & SS students are eligible
- Max. 5 students per team
- Obtain guidelines from & submit registration form to Mme Thériault (theriaultm@selwyn.ca)

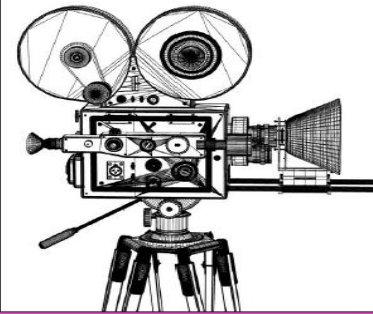
Finalist videos will be shown at a school Assembly.



SUBMISSION DATE:
December 1st 2014 (16:00)

PRIZE: Paid lunch out for 1st place

VIDEO CONTEST



No Homophobia in VERITAS

Create a 30-second original video that aims to convince others to join the fight against homophobia.

TO PARTICIPATE:

- MS & SS students are eligible
- Max. 5 students per team
- Obtain guidelines from & submit registration form to Mme Thériault (theriaultm@selwyn.ca)

Finalist videos will be shown at a school Assembly.



SUBMISSION DATE:
May 21st 2014 (before 16:00)

PRIZE: Paid lunch out for 1st place

Diversity

Show us the impact of being **open-minded**
in a 30-second original video!

SUBMISSION DATE:
March 30, 2016 by 4 PM

A mind is like a parachute.
IT DOESN'T WORK IF IT ISN'T OPEN.



Finalist videos (teams of max 5 people) will be shown at
a school assembly!

PAID LUNCH OUT FOR 1ST PLACE



SPONSORED BY THE
AS PART OF
DIVERSITY WEEK

Selwyn House
**GAY-STRAIGHT
ALLIANCE**

A few examples of winning videos...



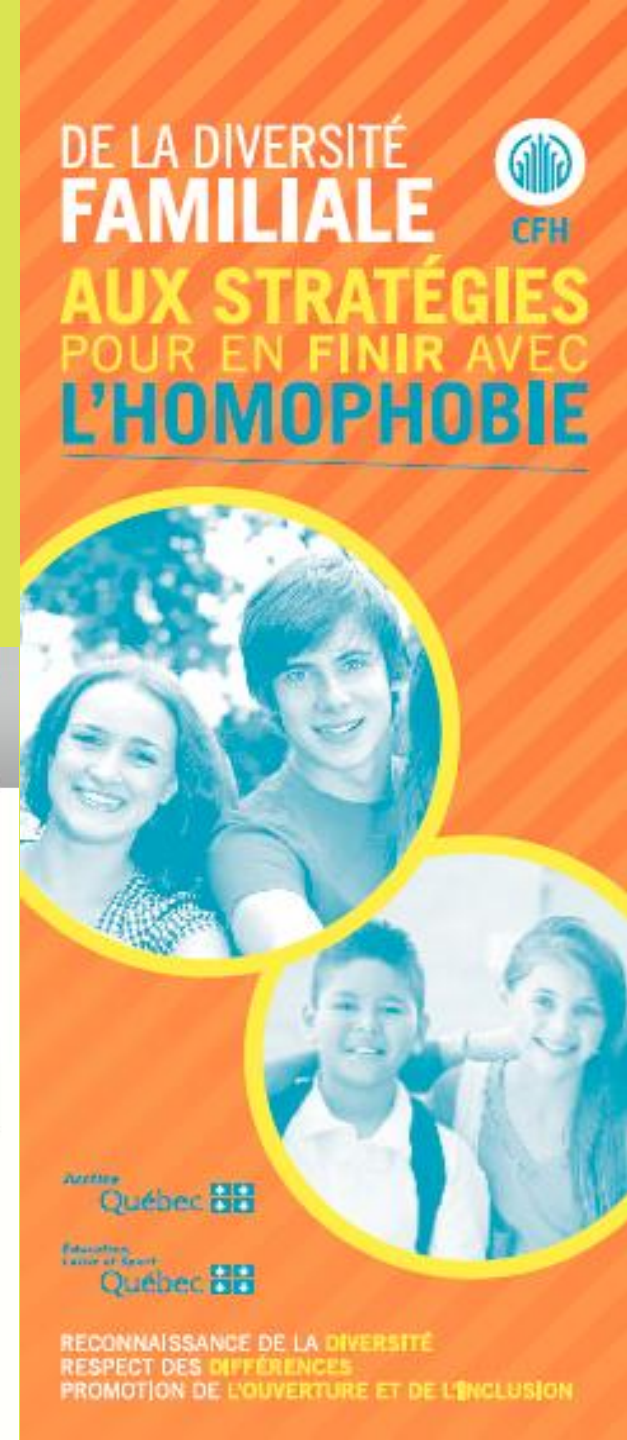
Staff Training

Many free workshops
are probably available in
your area



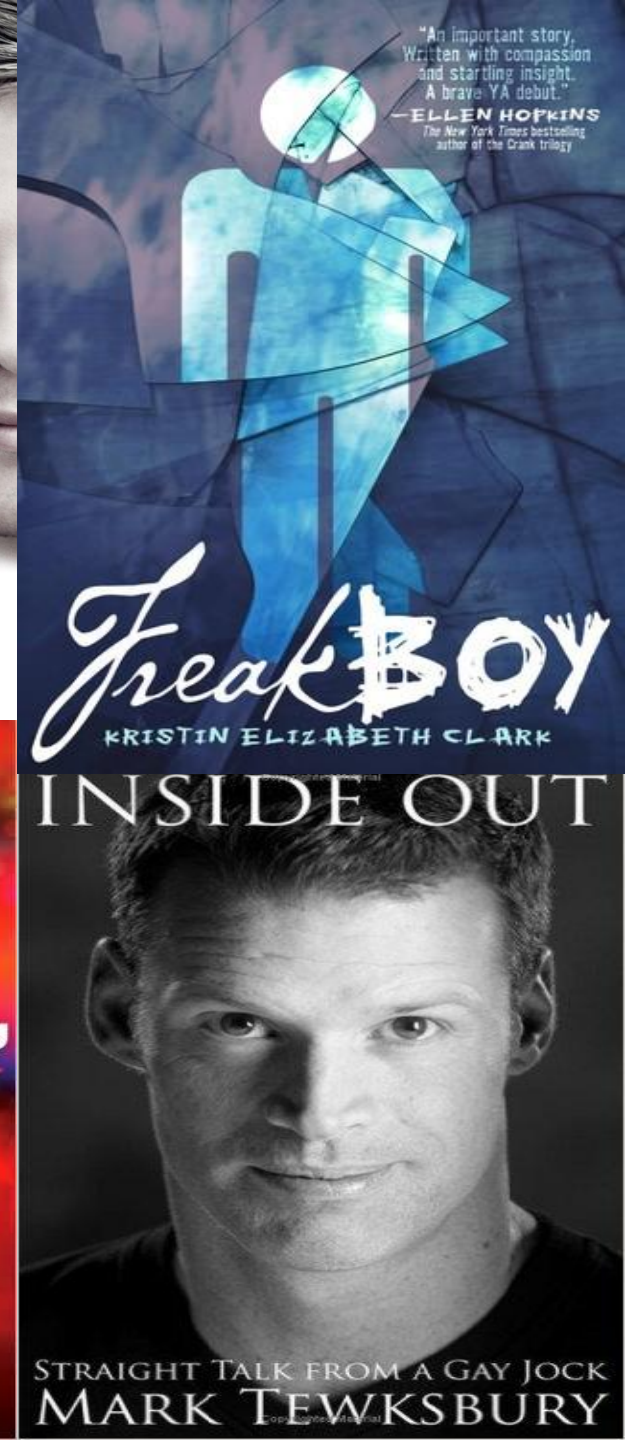
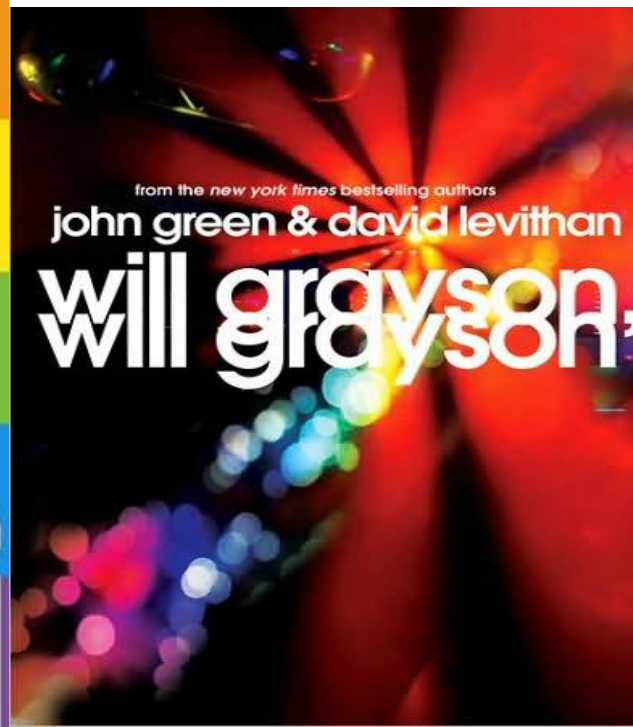
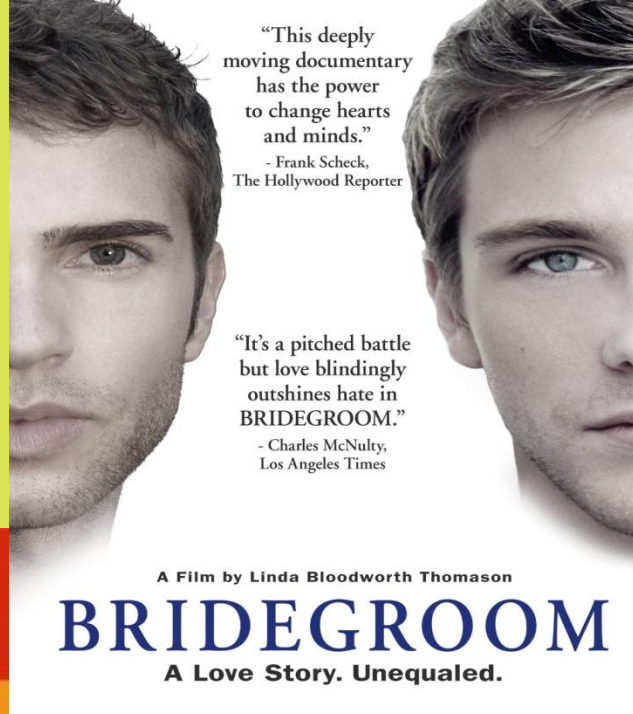
[McGill.ca](#) / [SOCIAL EQUITY AND DIVERSITY EDUCATION OFFICE](#)

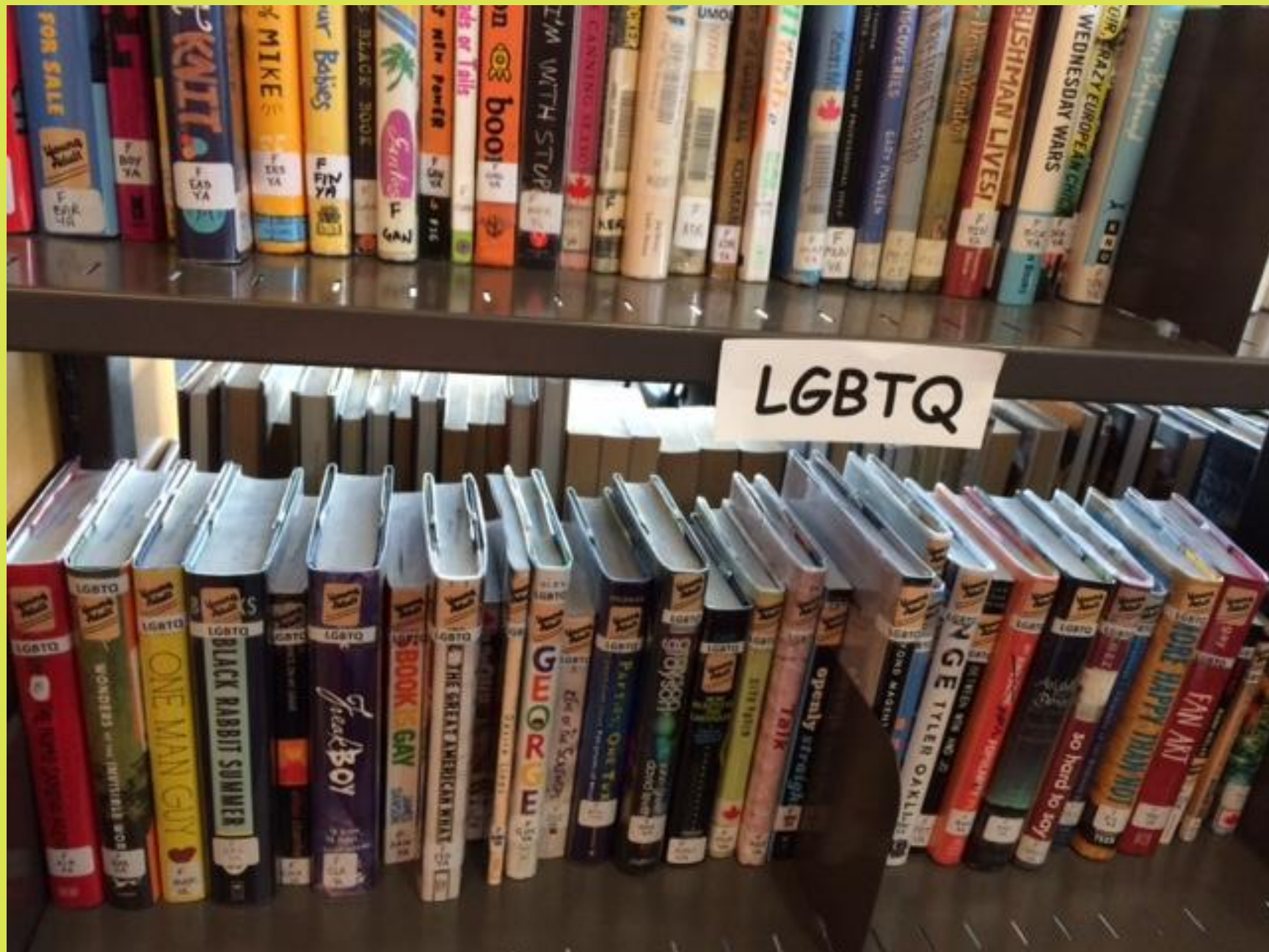
Training and Workshops



Resources in the library...and making them known

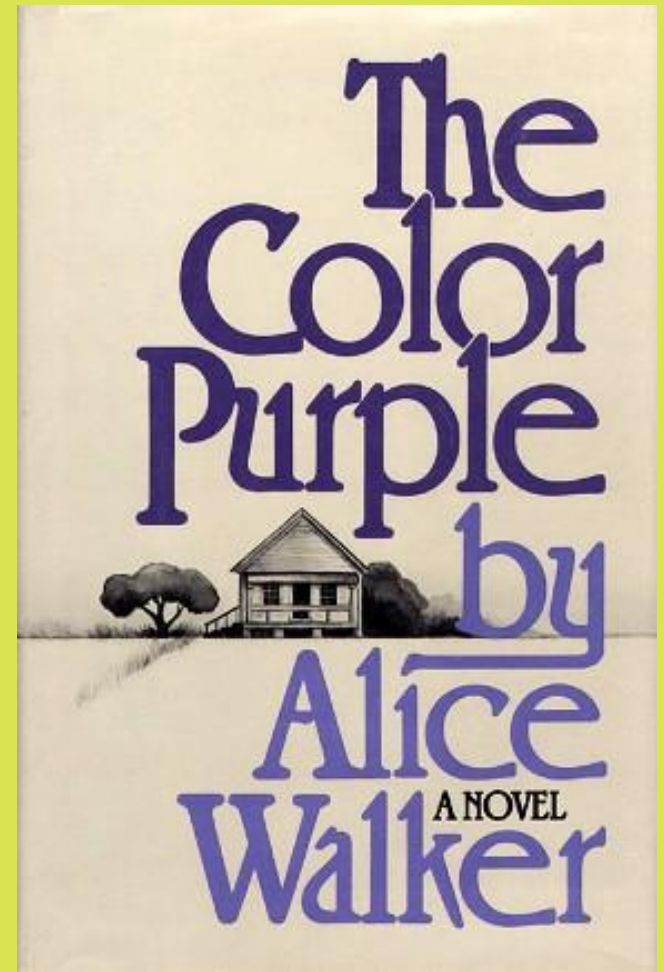
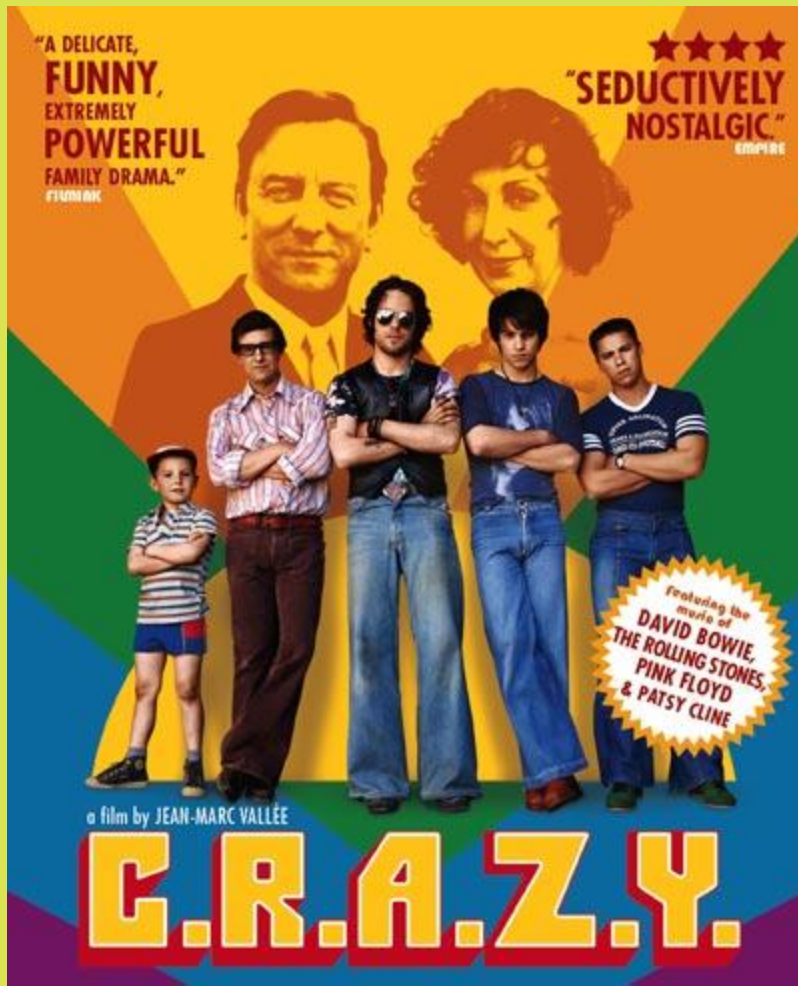
THIS
BOOK
IS
GAY
JAMES
DAWSON





Encourage staff to integrate LGBTQ resources into their curriculum

Reading lists, guest speakers, films, etc.



INTERESTED IN A TAG MINI-WORKSHOP?

Members of the GSA will visit your TAG group to help your students:

- **Become aware of LGBTQ-related language**
- **Learn appropriate terms related to sexuality, gender expression and gender identity**
- **Explore the connotation associated with certain language and its impacts**

An interactive activity suited to advisors who wish to create a safe space in their group or classroom



Le 17 mai,
je soutiens la
Journée Mondiale de Lutte
Contre l'Homophobie !

**THE
SELWYN
HOUSE
GAY-
STRAIGHT
ALLIANCE
PRESENTS**

....

Breaking Down the Walls Experience

DIVERSITY WEEK





Guest speaker: Mark
Tewksbury
(1992 Olympic gold
medalist)

Fan Day

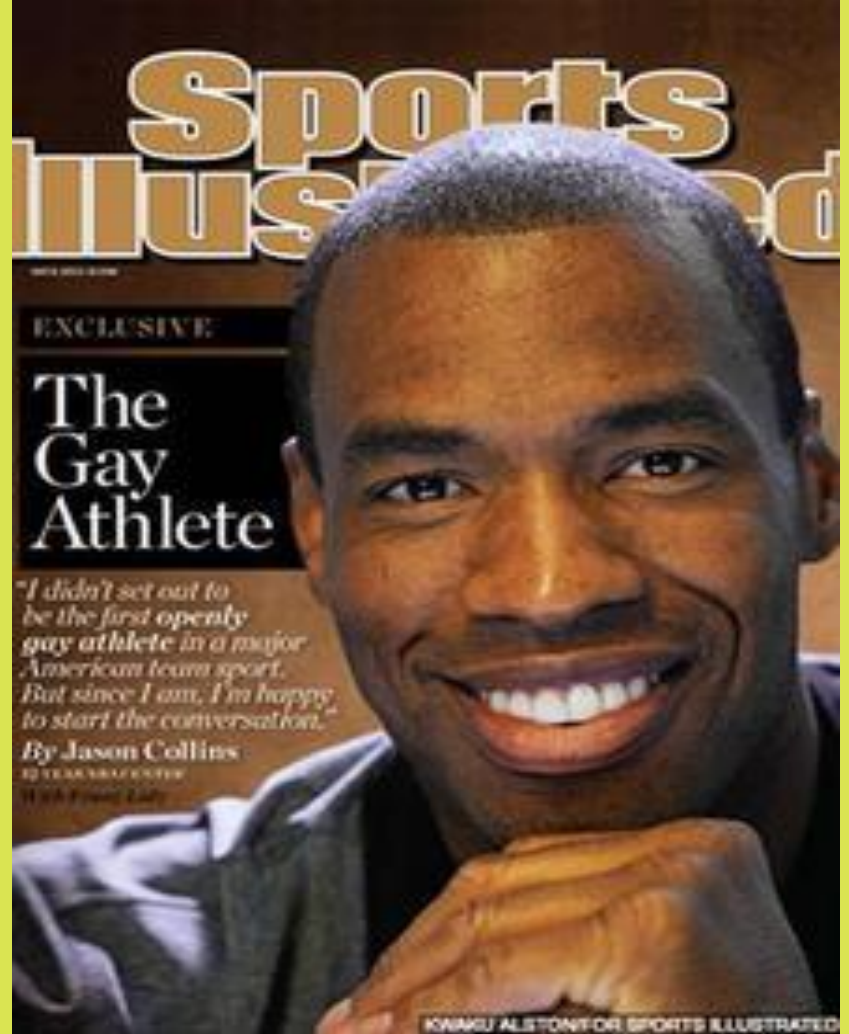


Cultural Quiz



Resource table in cafeteria

LGBT Resources



Documentary on
homophobia in
sports



The Selwyn Parent Volunteer Association & GSA present...

SELWYN HOUSE INTERNATIONAL FOOD FAIR



In the spirit of celebrating diversity in our community, Selwyn House will host an international food fair where you will be able to taste flavors originating from around the world.

WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

We are looking for parents & students wishing to share a bit of their culture by delighting our taste buds with a traditional menu item.

ALL PROCEEDS will benefit a local charity that promotes diversity.

DATE: April 8 2014

TIME:

SS = 12:30-13:00

MS = 13:00-13:30

WHERE: Coristine Hall

**FOOD TICKETS WILL
BE ON
SALE
AT THE
DOOR**



Gender neutral & diverse family inclusive forms

- Do your school forms still ask for « mother & father » ?
- Is asking gender on a form really relevant ? If yes, can the question be more open-ended ?

Example:

1. I identify my gender as _____.

OR

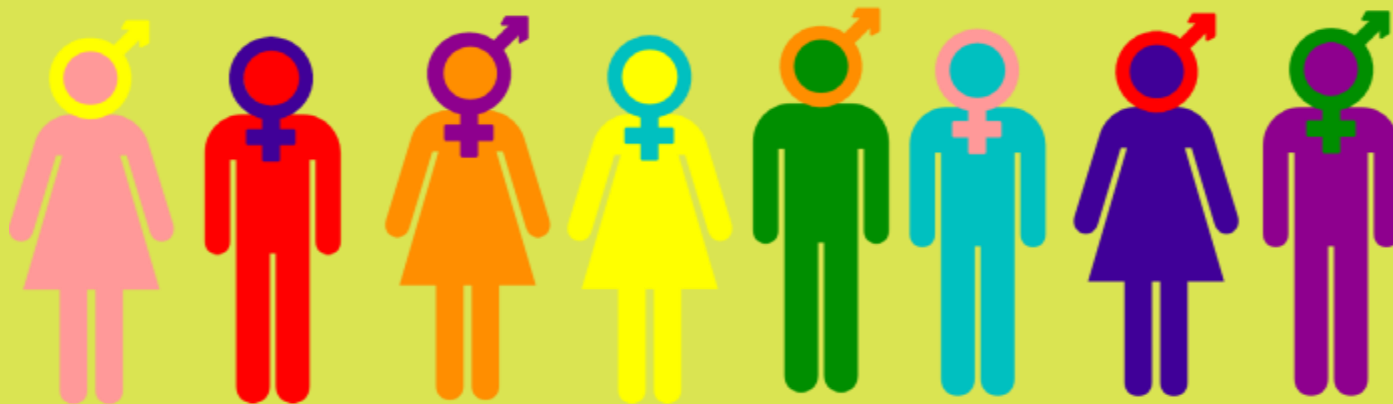
1. I identify my gender as:

- a) man
- b) woman
- c) trans
- d) _____ (fill in the blank)



Support your LGBTQ faculty & staff

- Do they feel hesitate to bring their partners to social functions? Are their partners made to feel welcome in the school community?
- Does the administration support teachers being open with their students about their sexuality (if it's important to them)?
- Does the administration support LGBT teachers when concerns from parents arise?



Can a GSA really make a difference? What impacts have we noticed?

- Old Boys who have come back or emailed to express their wish that the GSA has existed when they were at our school
- Sample testimonies:

« I am so glad of your group's bravery and good works [...] my time at the school in the late 80's was a very dark time. I seriously contemplated killing myself from the barrage of verbal and physical attacks I endured [...] standing up for these principles is not based on politics, but basic ideas of respect, and right and wrong that are universal. » (email correspondance from Old Boy)

From a school-culture point of view, we were impressed by the efforts Selwyn appears to be making to create an environment in which all students feel comfortable. This includes hosting a chapter of the Gay Straight Alliance, and the rainbow triangles displayed on some staff members' doors. We were also impressed that the library displays books by prominent female authors such as Margaret Atwood, as well as books with obvious female protagonists. The boys at Selwyn appear to be provided with opportunities to pursue interests that, in a co-ed environment, might be pigeonholed as "female".

Excerpt from a parent application letter

Article written by student-teacher

« When I was in high school, Selwyn had a reputation as a macho school where coaches called out poor performances by calling students wimps or girls [...] I worried that Selwyn had not changed [...] I found colleagues that not only empathized with my situation but also gave me the courage to be open with my students. To my amazement, the students were just as accepting as the teachers. [...] this accepting environment made me comfortable in my own skin while I was teaching, and it made me a better teacher. »



Language has improved

'THAT'S SO GAY.'

LET'S BE HONEST, IT'S PROBABLY NOT.



Gay. Let's get over it.

@stonewalluk facebook

★ Stonewall

I DON'T SAY
"THAT'S SO GAY"
BECAUSE
THE WORDS
GAY & STUPID
ARE NOT
INTERCHANGEABLE.



/YOUDONTSAYDUKE



© Duke University

Criticism & difficulties

- GLSEN 2007b – 4 types of school environments → identifying them & tips on how to deal with them
 - 1) Hostile school
 - 2) Resistant school
 - 3) Passive school
 - 4) Inclusive school
- Initial resistance – our signs were ripped down
- Attendance – how to not single out? silent resources?
- Criticism heard:
 - « Not the role of a school »
 - « Keep politics out of school »
 - « The school made me into the man I am today. A GSA doesn't belong. »
 - « Against my religion »



- Inevitably, your school will be confronted with how it will welcome transgender students.

If a student who was born a biological female but identifies as male wants to apply to your school, will she be accepted?

- How would the staff react to the student?
- Would fellow students be accepting?
- Which issues might arise? Will she be allowed to use the boys' washroom?

Questions?



Thank you!
Always keep an open mind.

If one GSA will be created after today, it was worth
my trip.

References

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